**Livestock worrying - bonus episode.mp3**

Hi and welcome again to “Ahead of the field” with me, Will Evans. This is another of our short bonus episodes exploring a specific farming topic in more detail with an expert from NFU Mutual. We're joined here by David Harrison, one of NFU Mutual's farm insurance specialists. And we're going to be talking about livestock worrying.

Wil: David, NFU Mutual claims that statistics show that livestock worrying by dog has increased significantly in the last five years. What steps can farmers take to reduce the risk of their animals being killed or injured?

David: Signage is very important. I think we've probably all seen situations where we've been walking through the countryside and the signs are very old and tattered. So it's worth considering putting up new signage, but it's also important to take it down as well. So if sheep and livestock are not in fields, take the signs down and then put up fresh signage when the sheep move back into the field, which should stand out more to dog walkers.

Social media and even village notice boards can be important as well. Where we live, there's an area of open moorland just outside the village and there's good publicity on social media when the sheep are going to be on that land. So you know when you can take your dog out for that last run off the lead before the before the sheep arrive. It can be worth talking to dog walkers as well. Most will respond favourably to a polite request to keep dogs on leads if you can explain to them why that needs to be the case.

It's also worth watching the calendar and the weather forecast as well. So busy bank holidays and good weather could bring out walkers and dog walkers. So it might be worth considering moving sheep or cattle to another field in that situation.

Any sheep worrying incident should be reported to the police. And you can also work closely with the police. Sometimes the police community support officers will spend time out in public areas raising awareness of the issues of sheep worrying and encouraging people to keep their dogs on leads.

Sometimes, unfortunately, though, it gets to the point where after repeated attacks, it's just not worth putting livestock in some fields that have got footpaths through them. So it may be time to just consider growing hay or making silage in that field. Consider also petitioning your local MPs to raise awareness of the issue of livestock worrying with them so that the profile is raised.

Will: Why do you think that dog attacks are increasing?

David: I think a lot of it is around. There are more and more restrictions on where dogs can be walked, particularly in towns and cities where some public areas and parks dogs are banned from. So people tend to then move out into the countryside to exercise their dogs there. And I think people often believe that their pet is very well trained and they don't perceive there's any risk of their dog attacking sheep or chasing cattle. To some extent, there is a naivete there, a lack of education. Some people are simply not aware of what damage their family pet can cause. And even if there's no visible evidence of a ewe having been injured, the stress of being chased or worried can cause them to abort if they're in lamb.

Will: Thanks, David. If you've enjoyed this podcast, please do subscribe through your normal podcast app, and that way you won't miss an episode.

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